

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# The Kyoto School and the West

## Review and Evaluation

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FROM THE MIDDLE of the nineteenth century, Japanese thinkers have been interested in Western philosophy. Since the Japanese originally believed that this foreign form of thought had no parallel in their tradition, they developed a new word to translate the idea of *philosophy*, namely, *tetsugaku*. This coining of a new term created some distance between the traditional forms of Japanese thought such as Buddhist doctrine and the new modes of analysis, speculation, and argumentation being imported from the West. To this day in Japan, the word *tetsugaku* has a distinctively Western ring and in most Japanese universities the study of *tetsugaku* is restricted to the study of Western philosophy. In fact, most Japanese departments of philosophy could be considered, in terms of the content of courses offered anyway, branch offices of Western, particularly German, departments.

As readers of the *Eastern Buddhist* are well aware, however, this view of philosophy is not universal among the Japanese. There are many Japanese thinkers who consider premodern Japanese thought to be a philosophical tradition distinct from, but also fundamentally in accord with, the basic motivation and purpose of Western philosophy. In the work of these individuals there is valuable cross-fertilization and dialogue between the Eastern and Western intellectual traditions. Most of the creative work in this area has been done by members of the so-called Kyoto School of philosophy, a tradition having its roots at Kyoto University among the specialists in philosophy of religion. In particular, the tradition is considered to have its foundation in the writings of NISHIDA Kitarō (1870–1945). In this article we will briefly review some of the main features of this tradition and discuss its interaction with Western thought as represented in Western scholarship and translations. Furthermore, some

comments and suggestions will be made about the future of this particular dialogue between East and West.

*The Early Development of the Kyoto School*

There is universal agreement that Nishida was the driving force behind this radically new way of doing philosophy in Japan and many of the early members of the School such as TANABE Hajime were his direct disciples. Mention should also be made of WATSUJI Tetsurō as a peripheral member of the group. Although Watsuji was, in many respects, quite distant from the tradition—his major source of premodern inspiration was Confucianist rather than Buddhist, for example—he did study under Nishida and even dedicated a book to his former teacher. In fact, when we take into consideration his deep interest in existential philosophers, particularly Heidegger, he was very much in tune with some of the second-wave members of the Kyoto School such as Nishitani and Takeuchi. Ultimately, the issue is not whether to consider Watsuji to be a member of the School, but rather, to recognize him in his own right to be a great philosopher, deserving much more attention than he has thus far been given by Western scholars of modern Japanese philosophy.

It is sometimes assumed that the early figures in the Kyoto School were primarily interested in East-West synthesis or East-West dialogue, but the actual writings of Nishida, Tanabe, and Watsuji, for example, contain very little dialogue and only a very restricted kind of synthesis. For the purposes of this essay, we will focus only on Nishida since his role was most crucial in what was to follow.

First, a most telling fact is that Nishida never explicitly wrote any significant philosophical work for a Western audience. This fact is striking when we remember that Nishida knew German very well (he often wrote his journal entries in German) and he had close students who actually studied philosophy in Germany and were fluent in the language. Thus, there was no linguistic barrier preventing him from publishing works in German or at least supervising the German translation of his writings. If he were really interested in East-West dialogue or really committed to formulating a transcultural, world philosophy, he obviously could have made his ideas more available to non-Japanese. In this regard, his national isolation is in marked contrast with the international acclaim received by his lifelong friend, D. T. Suzuki.

This evidence for a lack of interest in global dialogue is, of course, circumstantial and it would be dangerous to speculate on Nishida's intention simply on the grounds of what he did *not* do. Still, we should look more carefully at Nishida's writings for a clearer sense of his philosophical motivations. This is no easy task and the issue requires a detailed and careful study. For now,

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however, I wish to suggest a tentative theory that will not only help us to understand Nishida better, but will also place the development of the Kyoto School within a larger historical and cultural context.

Since Nishida's writings span mainly the period from 1910–1945, we cannot presume to interpret his work without considering the immediately preceding Meiji period, the time when Japan opened its doors to Western influence, including Western philosophy. When Japan was forced to trade with the West in the mid-nineteenth century, it was essentially a feudalistic society in its politics, economics, and technology. In a practical sense, Japan had to face the realities of its vulnerability. The United States had already filled its continent and was soon jumping across the Pacific into the Aleutians, Hawaii, Midway, and eventually the Philippines. Meanwhile, Britain and France were spreading eastward into India, Indo-China, and China. Russia was establishing its claim to the northern islands off Japan's coast. Thus, Japan had to choose between two alternatives: either it had to leave itself susceptible to Western colonization or it had to build a technological and military presence of its own. Obviously, the latter choice was taken.

In order to effect this radical transformation of its society, Japan had to adopt quickly many aspects of Western culture such as political structure, scientific development, industrialization, education, and social services. Christianity, in fact, was reintroduced into Japan as part of this absorption of Western culture. With the military success against Russia and China in the Meiji period, Japan grew confident that it was a burgeoning superpower and that it would be able to establish and sustain a sphere of influence throughout East and perhaps Southeast Asia as well as a major portion of the South Pacific.

A result of this striking success was that Japan now had the luxury to reflect on what it was doing and where it was going as a culture. In particular, the issue arose as to the proper relationship between Western and Japanese ideas. Certainly, the Japanese needed Western empiricism since it formed the basis of the technological revolution, but did the adoption of Western science commit them to a wholesale adoption of the Western philosophical and religious worldview? In the later Meiji period, this became a central intellectual debate. It was decided quite early that the connection between Christianity and science was an important link in the development of the Western tradition, but the connection was not necessary in Japan. Thus, Christianity was no longer pushed as an integral part of Japanese modernization. (It was decided after some discussion, for example, that it was not advisable for the emperor to become a Christian.)

It was much more difficult, however, to find a way of separating Western science from Western philosophy. On a popular philosophical level, the ideal was expressed in terms of a compromise: the Japanese would adopt Western

science and keep Eastern morality. For the more serious and profound Japanese philosophers, however, this was not an answer but a problem. How could the two coexist within a consistent philosophical system? This question gives, I believe, a clue to the motivation behind the philosophizing in the first phase of the Kyoto School's development, particularly in Nishida's own writings.

Nishida's philosophy is usually discussed in terms of two phases: the earlier "pure experience" formulation and the later theory called the "logic of *basho*," that is, the "logic of place." In discussing the differences between these two phases, though, we should be equally aware of their basic similarity and continuity. In the theory of pure experience developed in his first major work, *Study of Good*, Nishida tried to establish a single ground for all kinds of experience whether they be intuitive, empirical, rational, or creative. He sought this ground in the psychological unity, clarity, and presentness of what William James called "pure experience," that is, raw givenness. In short, by using James' theory of radical empiricism (philosophy should be based only on what we directly experience, but it should also take into account *all* that we directly experience) Nishida hoped to reveal the universal source of both empiricism and religious/ethical/aesthetic intuitionism.

From the standpoint of his own later work, Nishida himself criticized *Study of Good* as being overly psychologistic and mystical. Certainly, most contemporary Western philosophers would agree with that evaluation. The enterprise was important in two crucial ways, however. First, it signaled the failure of Nishida's final attempt to import and modify a Western philosophy as a remedy for the Japanese uneasiness about the relationship between Western science and traditional Japanese spirituality (whether religious, aesthetic, or ethical). In this way, *Study of Good* can be seen as the final phase of the wholesale philosophical importation of ideas that marked the Meiji period. Second, Nishida's dissatisfaction with the book convinced him that one could not simply translate traditional Japanese thinking into some already existing Western philosophical system. Rather, what was needed was a new logic (*ronri*), a new form of "Western" philosophy developed specifically in response to Japanese requirements. Thus, Nishida tried to develop a Western-like philosophy that would show the relative place of scientific thinking vis-à-vis the spirituality of traditional Japan. This seems to be the motivation behind the development of his later theory, the logic of *basho* or "place."

Nishida's logic of place is much too complex to discuss in detail here, but to follow the development of the Kyoto School, we need only look at the theory in its barest outline form. Essentially, the theory maintains that judgments can only take place within certain intellectual contexts and that ordinarily the context within which a judgment occurs is not visible in the judgment itself, although the context forms a necessary background for the judging act.

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A crude example will make this clearer. Suppose I make the judgment "the book is on the table." This judgment is taken to be an empirical fact, that is, it is a statement about the world independent of my interaction with it. The book is there whether I want it to be or not, whether I see it or not, whether I make a judgment about it or not. It is, in short, *objective*.

Yet, Nishida wonders, on what *experience* is that objectivity based? As soon as I ask *how* it is known, the objectivity of the judgment disappears. That is, the objective judgment "the book is on the table" is really based in a different kind of judgment entirely, namely, "I perceive that the book is on the table." This judgment involves not only the introduction of a psychological state (my perception) and my awareness of it (I know that I perceive it), but also an assumption about my consciousness itself, namely, that it is in accord with the world of external facts. Thus, Nishida reasons, the empirical judgment has its "place" only within the greater realm of self-consciousness. Nishida calls the first realm, that of the world of physicality, the *basho* of being. The second realm, that of self-consciousness, is sometimes called the *basho* of relatively nothing. Relative to the realm of objective judgment, it is a nothing, yet it is a nothing that makes possible the realm of objectivity. (Husserl makes a similar point, for example, in claiming that the scientific viewpoint is not objective in the sense that it is devoid of subjective intentionality. Rather, the scientific viewpoint is an intentional attitude in which subjective feelings are bracketed out of the experience and not taken into consideration. They are, in Husserl's terminology, "neutralized," an idea quite close to the kind of nothing that Nishida is talking about here.)

But is the *basho* of self-consciousness completely self-contained or does it, in turn, have its place within some other place? Consistent with his Buddhist background, Nishida is suspicious of the substantialization of the self. Even the Kantian or Husserlian transcendental ego seems to Nishida an abstraction not directly derived from concrete experience. Rather, Nishida argues, the self of self-consciousness is not an entity at all, but an act. It is, in his terms, an acting-intuiting (*kōlteki chokkan*). This concept is often left obscure in Nishida's own account, but the main point seems to be that judgment is possible only as an interactive flow from the person into the world (as the attitude, the action, the intentionality) simultaneous with the flow of the world into the person (as the givenness, the sensation, the presence). Thus, at the basis of every judgment is the interaction of the person with the world and the world with the person. The two cannot ultimately be separated. Subjectivity and objectivity are two profiles of the same event. This event is the true self, the most fundamental level of personhood. There is nothing outside it to which it can be relativized; hence, it is *absolute*. Yet, to talk about or judge its content, one must relocate the discussion into one of the other two *basho*. In itself, this ground of experience is directly known, but ineffable; hence, it is a *nothing*. Consequently, Nishida

refers to this *basho* as the realm of "absolutely nothing" (*zettai mu*).

If one needed to accept Nishida's *basho* theory in its entirety to qualify as a member of the Kyoto School, the School would have only one member. Even the first major successor to Nishida's philosophical chair, TANABE Hajime, had qualms about the system. In simplest terms, Tanabe believed that Nishida overemphasized the logical aspect of the structure and failed to explain properly the relationship between the spiritual and scientific. According to Tanabe, Nishida's structure lost the dialectical tension at the core of religious experience. That is, Nishida was criticized for substituting the stasis of logic for the dynamics of paradox. (It is noteworthy, by the way, that Tanabe came out of the Shin Buddhist, rather than Zen Buddhist, tradition.) In fact, Nishida himself never seemed completely satisfied with his own formulation. He was an intrepid revisionist who was always tinkering with new formulations and new systems. Although his actual systems may have been very rigorous, Nishida's approach to philosophizing was very open to exploring new vistas. Because of this openness, the Kyoto School was not locked into a specific terminology or systematic formulation. Rather, what marks the School is the persistent pursuit of certain key philosophical concerns. The nature of these concerns became clearer as the School itself developed.

#### *The Later Development of the Kyoto School*

With the next generation and the emergence of such philosophers as HISAMATSU Shin'ichi, NISHITANI Keiji, TAKEUCHI Yoshinori, ABE Masao, and UEDA Shizuteru, the Kyoto School took on a new form. With the exception of Hisamatsu, all of these philosophers are still living. All of them are much more knowledgeable about the Western philosophical (especially Continental) tradition and all of them studied or lectured in the West whereas Nishida never left Japan. Quite understandably, then, this later generation of scholars has actively involved itself in East-West dialogue. In general, this focus on comparative philosophizing and interacting with colleagues abroad is a hallmark of the Kyoto School in its present form.

Two important influences on the later Kyoto School deserve special mention. First, virtually all of present members have been deeply influenced by the existential-phenomenological tradition, particularly Heidegger. One of the misfortunes of history is that Nishida never really had the opportunity to interact with the philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger. He did teach a seminar on Husserl and he did have some acquaintance with Heidegger's *Being and Time*, but his study of these figures came too late in Nishida's career for them to be assimilated in great depth. As already noted, by the second decade of the twentieth century, Nishida was already blazing his own trail in developing a

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Western-like philosophy. Because of these historical factors, Nishida's comments on Husserl and Heidegger are sometimes insightful, sometimes disappointing, but always too brief. If there was a clear Western influence on Nishida's later thought, it was probably that of the Neo-Kantian Southern School: the philosophies of Rickert, Windelband, and Lask, for example. Viewed from our present perspective, however, this was only a peripheral movement in the development of twentieth-century Western philosophy and it cannot serve as a useful vehicle for dialogue between East and West. Thus, the interest of the contemporary Kyoto School in such philosophers as Heidegger is much more in harmony with the interests of Western Continental philosophy today.

The second important influence on the contemporary Kyoto School was the life and work of D. T. Suzuki. It is not accidental, for example, that most of the Kyoto School philosophy published in English has been printed in the *Eastern Buddhist*, the journal founded by Suzuki expressly for the purpose of East-West dialogue. From a strictly objective, Western vantage point, this is a strange development. Suzuki was not a member of the Kyoto School. In fact, he was not a philosopher at all, at least in the sense of formal training. Although his impact on Western, especially American, culture has been extensive in the areas of poetry, aesthetics, and general spirituality, his influence on Western philosophy has been nil. In fact, in some ways, his writings permanently alienated a significant portion of a whole generation of Western philosophers. Because of their exposure to Suzuki, for example, many professional Western philosophers will never read *any* works on Eastern thought, not as philosophical literature, anyway. This is understandable when we consider that Suzuki's greatest popularity in the United States was in the late 1950's and 1960's, about the same time that American philosophy assumed a strong analytic orientation. To a philosopher attempting to make philosophical language ever more precise and philosophical statements verifiable by empirical data, Suzuki's approach must have seemed outrageous.

There is another, more profound, way to evaluate Suzuki's influence, however. Suzuki's great contribution was not what he said but what he did. Suzuki's charismatic presence opened up the dialogue between East and West. Whereas many orthodox Western philosophers were dismayed at Suzuki's approach, many theologians found it refreshing and illuminating. The theological admirers covered a spectral range so broad as to include both Alan Watts and Paul Tillich. Furthermore, there were little pockets of philosophical interest (especially among those in the Continental tradition) that did not follow the pattern of the mainstream. Heidegger himself was impressed by Suzuki in their personal encounter.

Less visible, but more important, was Suzuki's influence on Western studies of Buddhism. Many of today's younger generation of Western Buddhist scholars

were first attracted to Buddhist studies through reading Suzuki. This means that the study of Buddhism in the West was taken somewhat out of the halls of philological and historical studies and brought closer to religious and theological concerns. The impact of this new orientation has only just begun, but in future decades perhaps, the Western study of Buddhism will gradually take a new direction. Many of the younger scholars have had training in Buddhist practice as well as Buddhist doctrines, history, and textual analysis. Most of them are uncomfortable with Suzuki's mode of explanation, but many of them share Suzuki's concerns.

The purpose of pointing out these influences on the contemporary Kyoto School is to demonstrate that a common meeting ground for Japanese-Western philosophical dialogue is being mapped out. The major defining boundaries seem to include: (1) the existential-phenomenological tradition; (2) Buddhist-Christian dialogue on a theological plane; (3) Buddhist studies with an emphasis on the interrelationship between Buddhist practice and Buddhist thought. At the conclusion of this article, I will make some specific recommendations about the direction I would recommend for future dialogue. First, however, we should review briefly the work that has already been done in the West.

### *Translations*

- NISHIDA Kitarō. *A Study of Good*; trans. Valdo H. Viglielmo.  
*Art and Morality*; trans. David A. Dilworth and Valdo H. Viglielmo (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1973).  
*Fundamental Problems of Philosophy*; trans. David A. Dilworth (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1970).  
*Intelligibility and the Philosophy of Nothingness*; trans. Robert Schinzinger (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973).
- WATSUJI Tetsurō. *Climate and Culture*; trans. George Bownas (originally published as *Climate* by Japanese Government Printing Company; periodically republished by Tokyo: Hokuseido Press).
- Frederick Franck (editor). *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School* (NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982).

As the above list of book-length translations indicates, Nishida is still presented as the main figure of the Kyoto School. This is understandable since, as we have indicated above, Nishida can be considered the inspiration behind the



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whole movement. Yet, he continues to be virtually unknown among Western philosophers and the translations are not best-sellers even among philosophically oriented audiences. There are several reasons for this lack of interest, two of which we can consider here.

First, there has been no book-length study of Nishida in any Western language. Thus, to the Western reader needing a guide through Nishida's writings (and who does not?), there is no good single source to which one can be referred. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that most of the translations have inadequate introductions. They tend to introduce the work in a general fashion, but do not present the reader with a detailed analysis and explanation. Furthermore, there is usually a lack of explanatory footnotes. This is a self-defeating approach to presenting Nishida to Western readers, since Nishida's writings, even in Japanese, are not easy to follow. This observation leads us into our second point.

As we have already noted, Nishida did not address an international audience. He did not write in a Western style, using Western terminology, because he wanted to interact with Western philosophers. On the contrary, he was writing in a Western style for his fellow Japanese. He was trying to develop a Western style philosophy for us (the Japanese) so that we could integrate the new Western empirical, scientific worldview with our own cultural tradition's emphasis on ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual intuition.

This does not mean that Nishida's philosophy is culture-bound and has no value in the global development of philosophy. But it does imply that any presenter of Nishida's ideas to the West must be prepared to build a bridge between Nishida's immediately intended audience and the larger world community. An effective translation of Nishida's works, therefore, must include a detailed introduction to the plan and purpose of the book as well as extensive explanatory notes. In this one respect, Schinzinger's attempt should be singled out as a step in the right direction. He limits his book to the translation of three essays from Nishida's later phase of thought and includes a general introductory essay as well as specific explanations for each of the three essays translated. Viglielmo's translation of *Study of Good* also includes an introduction by D. T. Suzuki which is interesting in presenting a sense of what the book intends to do and a concluding interpretive essay by Shimomura which is somewhat helpful. What is really needed, however, is a more philosophical explanation that would go over the key points in each of the four parts of the book.

In the near future we should see the publication of two much needed new translations of *Study of Good*: a German version supervised by UEDA Shizuteru and an English version supervised by ABE Masao. Since both of these translators are themselves distinguished philosophers related to the Kyoto School and since both are sensitive to the mindset of Western audiences, it is hoped that their translations will include the bridge building apparatus that seems so

desperately needed.

Furthermore, Dilworth and Viglielmo have reportedly finished drafts of Nishida's other works. Perhaps we will soon see a translation of one of the central works in the development of the later *basho* theory such as *Hataraku mono kara miru mono e* [From that which functions to that which sees]. Such a translation would be invaluable in bridging the early viewpoint (*Study of Good and Art and Morality*) with the later system (*Fundamental Problems and Intelligibility*). Again, the translation would only be useful, however, if there were an extensive introduction and detailed explanatory notation. By his own philosophical essays on Nishida, Dilworth has demonstrated that he has the background to supply this essential interpretive apparatus and I hope that he will choose to do so for such a volume.

The Watsuji book deserves a brief mention since it is the only translation of a major work by this extraordinary thinker. Although the translation is very good and readable, the content of the book—the relation between climate and the development of a culture's intellectual tradition—is hardly a topic of interest to most Western philosophers. This, I believe, is more an indication of the narrowness of the Western philosophical mind than a fair evaluation of the importance of Watsuji's work, but to demonstrate that point would require a book *about* Watsuji's *Climate* and not merely a translation of it. Instead, I would recommend that someone translate the *Rinrigaku* (Ethics) or at least the shorter *Ningengaku to shite no rinrigaku* (Ethics as the study of human being). Again, a comprehensive philosophical introduction and extensive footnotes would be required, but the topic would at least be closer to traditional Western interests and would, I believe, be a more representative example of Watsuji's own philosophical development.

In the case of Franck's *Buddha Eye*, we have quite a different sort of book. It mainly consists of a collection of essays by various members of the Kyoto School as well as by various individuals loosely related to the School. There are also some essays that have no relationship whatsoever to the Kyoto School such as Ikkyū (who preceded Nishida by half a millenium), KIYOZAWA Manshi, and SOGA Ryōjin. In fact, most of the essays are taken from back issues of the *Eastern Buddhist* and this seems to be the unifying thread. Thus, while the use of the term "Kyoto School" in the subtitle is a serious misnomer, at least the book is correct in identifying the *Eastern Buddhist* as the unofficial organ of the present day Kyoto School.

The book has two particular strengths. First, Franck uses a provocative tripartite structure to interweave the selected essays: Essays on the Self; Structure of Reality; What is Shin Buddhism? Franck states quite clearly that he selected the essays in part on the criterion of how much value he personally extracted from them as an interested, Western nonspecialist. His judgment in

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most cases is quite sound and the juxtaposition of essays is provocative in eliciting a Western response. Some of the essays are already recognized as classics and some of the others should be. (I have personally found the writings of Kiyozawa to be an excellent introduction to Shin Buddhism for Western undergraduates, for example. More translations of his writings should appear in readily available form.) As a paperback, the book could find a place in some college courses on comparative religion or comparative philosophy.

The second strength of the book is that it creates a handy anthology of what contemporary Japanese philosophers such as HISAMATSU Shin'ichi, NISHITANI Keiji, TAKEUCHI Yoshinori, ABE Masao, and UEDA Shizuteru can offer to the dialogue between the spiritual traditions of East and West. In many respects, the Kyoto School is a world leader in the comparative study of the philosophy of religion, but the work of its members has not been readily available to most Western readers. Thus, this book provides a service to Western students of religion who wish to broaden their understanding of cross-cultural religious and philosophical dialogue.

The major limitation of the book is the problem of where it fits into the larger context of the interaction of the Kyoto School with the West. The Kyoto School is, after all, a *philosophical* tradition and this first book in a Western language to use the term "Kyoto School" in its title includes several nonphilosophical essays. Thus, we have once again the problem of D. T. Suzuki's influence on how Japanese philosophy is viewed by Western philosophers. From this standpoint, it would have been better if Franck more clearly separated the essays which properly belong to Kyoto School from those which might be called background essays related to themes picked up by the Kyoto School. To do this, however, would tear apart that very structure of the book which I consider to be so provocative.

Thus, the best alternative would have been to omit the term "Kyoto School" entirely. For the purpose of creating more interaction between Japanese and Western philosophers, it is counterproductive to lump Ikkyū, D. T. Suzuki, and KRYOZAWA Manshi into the same category as Nishida or Nishitani, for example. This is not to make a value judgment as to which group of thinkers is better but rather, to point out that their methods and purposes are fundamentally different. Conversely, if Nishida were the recognized paradigm in the West of a Japanese thinker, it would be a disservice to Suzuki to lump him into the same category. For the present, I think it would be best to consider the Kyoto School a technical term referring to a specific philosophical tradition originating out of the thought of NISHIDA Kitarō.

*Commentaries*

Gino K. Piovesana. *Contemporary Japanese Philosophical Thought* (NY: St. John's University Press, 1969).

Hans Waldenfels. *Absolute Nothingness: Foundations of a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*. Translated by J. W. Heisig (NY: Paulist Press, 1980).

As already mentioned, there is a dearth of Western commentaries on the Kyoto School. Piovesana remains the classic English summary of modern Japanese philosophy, although it is now clearly dated and would benefit from a discussion of developments that have taken place in the last two decades. Furthermore, precisely because it is a survey, Piovesana strove for completeness in breadth, not depth. The discussions of the main philosophical figures are necessarily very short, therefore. The book is most valuable for giving the historical background out of which the Kyoto School developed. Nishida's philosophy did not just arise spontaneously; it was a response to issues first formulated and discussed in the Meiji period. The problem, if any, is that Piovesana's book needs a companion survey of premodern Japanese philosophy. That is, because there is no such study available in English at present, the uninformed Western reader may assume that modern Japanese philosophy can be understood without reference to the premodern period. Piovesana himself does not, of course, make this claim, but the misunderstanding is possible as long as there remains this gap in the Western treatment of modern Japanese philosophy.

In this regard, Waldenfels book is very clearly on the right track. Before embarking on a discussion of Nishitani's philosophy of religion, he spends about fifty pages discussing the roots of Nishitani's thought in early Buddhism, Nāgārjuna, Zen, and Nishida. This background material is essential for seeing the Kyoto School within the tradition of Japanese thought at large. One of the difficulties Western philosophers have encountered in trying to understand Nishida, for example, is that his thought is, in a sense, thoroughly Buddhist even though very few explicit references to Buddhism are made. Waldenfels makes this point most poignantly on page 36:

And here I agree that some psychological preparation is required for the Western reader [of Nishida], some basic knowledge of Buddhism and its understanding of Zen, some knowledge of Nishida's personal background and finally, some guidance in the study even of the translations of Nishida. For there are, besides the rare cases that Buddhism, the teaching of Shinran, etc., are mentioned directly, some quotations, short sayings as they are used by Zen masters in their instructions—sayings that after some time become dear and familiar to their disciples in the same way as Scripture sayings become dear to the Christian.

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In short, Waldenfels is acutely sensitive to the necessity of putting the Kyoto School figures into their own premodern intellectual tradition.

The question now arises of whether Waldenfels' treatment of this tradition is adequate. In general, his background material functions quite well, but there are two serious problems. First, Waldenfels too readily slips into a historical approach, particularly of the Zen tradition. Even though he has a subsection of the chapter on Zen called "Theory and Praxis in Zen Buddhism," we really find there only theory. The connection with Yogācāra, the now all too familiar discussion of the *Platform Sūtra* (analyzed à la Thomas Merton), and the passing discussion of Dōgen and Hakuin do not come to grips with the Zen meditational experience itself. Waldenfels really discusses nothing more than doctrinal observations.

If Zen-Christian dialogue is to progress on anything other than an abstract theological plane, one must take into account Zen's most radical philosophical claim, namely, that the way the world appears in *zazen* is the way the world really is. Thus, if one wants to know reality, one does not analyze it, one does not accumulate empirical data about it, one does not reason logically about it. One just perceives it in its prereflective, preconceptual showing of itself. In this respect Zen seeks to avoid all reductionism as well as all transcendence in the usual Western sense of the word. Thus, the phenomenological structure of the *zazen* experience itself is critical to understanding the nature of verification or authentication in Zen. In fact, one might say that the character of the primordial givenness of the *zazen* experience and its relationship to other modes of consciousness is a central issue in Japanese thinkers from Dōgen to the present Kyoto School philosophers.

A second problem with Waldenfels' discussion of the background of the Kyoto School is that he does not deal with the distinctiveness of Japanese Buddhism. The Japanese Buddhist tradition and, consequently, the philosophical predecessors of the Kyoto School, were not simply Buddhists or even Zen Buddhists. They were also very much *Japanese*. The nature of this Japaneseness is difficult to define, but it must be taken into account. It is not just fortuitous that there is no work in Indian, Chinese, Tibetan, or Korean Buddhism that is like Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*, for instance. Dōgen did not simply leave his teachings to be recorded posthumously by his disciples as was the usual custom in Chinese Ch'an. Instead, he took up his brush and wrote about the structure of the Zen experience. Hakuin, too, broke the usual rules of tradition by explicitly describing the details of his own enlightenment experiences. Thus, the Japanese Zen tradition has a much more varied and rich literary expression than we find in Chinese Ch'an.

Perhaps this expressiveness can be traced to the impact of the esoteric Buddhist tradition, whether *tōmitsu* (the Shingon form) or *taimitsu* (the Tendai form), on Japanese Buddhism at large. The founders of the Kamakura Buddhist

Schools (Pure Land, Zen, Nichiren) were, after all, all trained as Tendai monks on Mt. Hiei, an institution that had become quite esoteric in orientation by the end of the Heian period. TAMAKI Kōshirō, an eminent scholar on the development of Buddhism, has repeatedly noted that the doctrine of *hosshin seppō*, "the Dharmakāya preaches the dharma," is an idea given unique prominence in the Japanese tradition. In other words, the Japanese Buddhists tended to emphasize the idea that this world, as it is, is the expression of truth. Yet, in the very presence of this world, there is a depth which cannot be spoken but which is the basis of all expression.

This is not really a Buddhist idea so much as a Japanese idea and we find it in aesthetic discussions about such terms as *yūgen*, "shadowy profundity," and in moral discussions about such ideas as *makoto no kokoro*, "the genuine heart." In this context, for example, Zeami's discussions of the cultivation of the Nō actor, or FUJIWARA no Teika's discussion of how to write *waka*, or even MOTOORI Norinaga's discussion of how to understand the Heian ideal of *mono no aware* are as much a part of the Japanese spiritual tradition from which the Kyoto School draws its inspiration as is Indian Yogācāra or Chinese Ch'an. On the deepest level of cultural experience, I would argue, Buddhism was as much absorbed into Japanese culture as it was an influence on the development of Japanese culture.

The importance of this point will be reemphasized in my conclusion, but for now, we need only note that Waldenfels does not include this cultural aspect in his background discussion. This does not mean that Nishitani explicitly refers to the non-Buddhist intellectual tradition of Japan, but rather, that the Western audience needs some knowledge of this milieu if it is to follow the problematic of Nishitani's philosophy. In other words, a discussion of non-Buddhist Japanese thought would help bridge the cultural gap that separates the Western audience from becoming fully involved in the ideas of the Kyoto School.

In Part II of his book, Waldenfels gives a sensitive and perceptive account of Nishitani's philosophical anthropology and its relation to his philosophy of religion. Drawing mainly from Nishitani's classic work, *What Is Religion?* (a translation of which was serialized in the *Eastern Buddhist* and will soon be published in book form), Waldenfels gives a clear account of Nishitani's basic concepts of nihilum, scientism, nothingness, and personhood (the I-Thou relation). Waldenfels is excellent in articulating the existential problematic of human existence as outlined in Nishitani's philosophy of religion and he takes pains to draw the connections between Nishitani and Heidegger wherever they seem relevant. This clear and sympathetic treatment of Nishitani's complex philosophy is enough in itself to justify the importance of the book, but in Part III Waldenfels goes on to set the stage for the use of this philosophy as a vehicle for Christian-Buddhist dialogue.

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Waldenfels begins with a helpful clarification of the meaning of mysticism as defined by members of the Kyoto School such as Nishitani and Ueda as well as by Western, especially Catholic, theologians like Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar. The analysis of mysticism in both cases concludes with a consideration of the limitations of language and the importance of the relationship between apophatic and cataphatic theologies. In general, Waldenfels believes that the Christian tradition needs to reemphasize the almost submerged tradition of apophatic or negative theology. This observation leads into the next chapter's consideration of the relationship between God and emptiness.

Several members of the Kyoto School including Nishida and Nishitani have basically equated God with emptiness or nothingness. Waldenfels recognizes that this equation creates serious problems for the traditional Christian understanding, particularly in terms of the personhood of God, but he wonders whether the notion is as foreign as it may at first seem. Again following Rahner, Waldenfels emphasizes the element of *mystery* embedded in the nature of God. As defined by Rahner this mystery can be articulated in terms of an emptiness or nothingness, an emptiness which, as the ground of all that exists, is also a fulness. Thus, Waldenfels finds an important Catholic theological parallel to the established position of the Kyoto School. Furthermore, Waldenfels attempts to demonstrate that the usual Kyoto School critiques of the Christian "substantialization" of God cannot apply to a position like Rahner's.

In his final chapter, Waldenfels extends this idea to the Christian doctrine of *kenosis*, that is, the Pauline statement that God "emptied himself" to become incarnate as Christ. In this emptying, as an indication of the nature of both divine and human personhood, Waldenfels once again sees a narrowing of the distance between the religious philosophy of the Kyoto School and a certain type of Christian (especially Roman Catholic) theology.

Waldenfels' attempt at establishing a basis for dialogue between Catholic theologians and philosophers of the Kyoto School is a daring and exciting enterprise. His book, especially Parts II and III, deserves a most careful reading and evaluation, much more than we can give it here. A few points do, however, stand out and can be mentioned briefly.

First, the Rahnerian notion of mystery will have to be further refined if it is to serve as a bridge with the Kyoto School. In a certain respect, for the Zen Buddhist there is no mystery. Things are present just as they are; we need only remove our self-delusions if we are to perceive them as such. Waldenfels slips around this potential criticism from the Kyoto School by reducing the concept of mystery, when convenient, into merely the claim of ineffability. But, in fact, this is quite contrary to Rahner's overall intent. The mystery in beings is precisely their expressiveness. The world is grounded in mystery because it is the expression of Logos. The world is, as it were, God's expression of Himself to Himself. Thus,

Rahner's sense of mystery is intimately tied to his concept of symbols. The meaning of the world is always pointing beyond itself to its creative origin.

We may note, however, that this idea is very similar to the previously mentioned doctrine of *hosshin seppō*, "the Dharmakāya preaches the dharma." Thus, Nishitani, and the Kyoto philosophers in general, must be pressed to explain the nature and function of the Dharmakāya. Dōgen, for example, says that mountains and waters are themselves sūtras, are themselves patriarchs. This implies that they are not simply being mountains, but they are also somehow *expressive* of the dharma. What does this mean? Perhaps a dialogue in which this notion is compared with Rahner's notion of symbols would be helpful.

Second, following on our previous observation, Nishitani must be pressed to explain the relationship between religious spirituality and artistic creativity. A hallmark of the Zen tradition is precisely the connection between religion and art. Hisamatsu, of course, was very much concerned with this issue, but even Nishida wanted to find the common ground of beauty, truth, and the good. In a sense, the metaphysics of nothingness is too safe a realm for interreligious dialogue. We must continually ask ourselves what the *experience* of nothingness or the *experience* of *kenosis* means to me as a Buddhist or as a Christian. Theology is very dangerous if it becomes detached from the expressions of everyday life.

Third, as a corollary to the concern for application in everyday life, more focus must be given to religious *practice*. Is prayer in any way an activity similar to *zazen*, for example? If not, what is the point of discussing the theological similarities or differences behind the practices? With regard to this type of inquiry, the work of scholars like William Johnston is very important. As Johnston has pointed out, meditation and prayer are physical as well as intellectual or spiritual activities. To understand their true function, we must take into account all of these dimensions. In this regard, we should look carefully at the stages of progress in one's practice as discussed by both the Christian and Buddhist traditions. Nishitani, in effect, does this with his discussion of the Great Death and its relevance in today's society. Does Christianity have any similar experiential category?

Fourth, we should take the Zen Buddhist's advice and be careful lest we become too attached to words. The very notion of nothingness entails the recognition of the limitation of language. Why, then, do Christian-Buddhist dialogues so often result in the Buddhists' claiming that their idea of nothingness is better than the Christian's idea of Being and vice versa? Are we absolutely certain that the Buddhist notion of nothing is not virtually identical with the Christian notion of Being? Neither idea in its traditional and proper sense seems particularly nihilistic or particularly substantialist. If we return to the phenomenology of the experience of Being and the experience of Nothingness, we may be able to concretize our comparisons and contrasts.



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In any case, Waldenfels' book is a treasury of provoking ideas and avenues for future research and discussion. It is hoped that it will be only the first such attempt at interreligious dialogue. In fact, through correspondence with Professor Fritz Buri, I am informed that a new book on this topic will be available in the very near future, namely, his *Der Buddha-Christus als der Herr des wahren Selbst: Die Religionsphilosophie der Kyoto-Schule und das Christentum* (Verlag Paul Haupt, Bern und Stuttgart, 1982). Although I have thus far only seen the galleys of the Preface and Table of Contents, it is clear that the book will be another pioneering work. First, the work will continue the dialogue initiated by Waldenfels except that it will deal more explicitly with the symbol systems of self-understanding and personal liberation in both the Buddhist and Christian traditions. More importantly for our present purposes, however, is that fact that most of the chapters in the book deal specifically with the philosophies of the major figures in the Kyoto School: Nishida, Tanabe, Suzuki, Hisamatsu, Nishitani, Takeuchi, Ueda, and Abe. The Table of Contents indicates that each figure will be analyzed in terms of a particular theme and central interest. Thus, the reader should receive both an overall picture of the Kyoto School and some detailed knowledge of how the various figures differ in perspective and emphasis. Judging from the limited materials available to me, the structure of the book seems particularly interesting and useful.

It is, of course, impossible to make any judgment about the book at this stage, but since the point is relevant to our discussion in this article, I will make one brief observation. In his Preface (pages 8 and 9 of the galleys), Buri refers several times to the common theme of "Transzendenz" in the two traditions. In fact, he says that the phrase "Der Herr des wahren Selbst" is "ein Ausdruck des Transzendenzbezogenheit des Selbstverständnisses" and that he sees the symbol of the Buddha-Christ "als Symbol der Transzendenz." I am not sure what Buri means by this "transcendence" but the idea should be an interesting point of discussion. Can the word *transcendence* really be used without equivocation to refer to some aspect of both Christianity and Buddhism? I wonder whether this issue will take us back to the problem of Being vs Nothingness.

This is not in any way meant to be a criticism of Buri—I certainly cannot presume to understand his use of the concept simply by reading his Preface. Rather, I am only pointing out the difficulty of terminology for any cross-cultural philosophical or theological dialogue. So many interreligious conversations seem to turn on the issue of whether a certain word from one tradition can be properly applied in another.

In any case, the book looks interesting and I hope it receives the attention it deserves and that an English translation like that of Waldenfels might be forthcoming. I suspect that Buri's work would be a valuable resource for American students interested in the Kyoto School or in comparative philosophy and religion.

*Conclusions and Recommendations*

As we have seen, Western interaction with the Kyoto School has been slow in developing. One reason for this is that until recently there has been little secondary material analyzing the School and translations have been limited mainly to the works of Nishida. With the recent publication of Waldenfels' book and the forthcoming work by Buri, however, we are finally getting commentaries that will help immensely in developing the Western awareness of this important and creative tradition. Furthermore, Franck has collected some provocative essays into a handy, attractive anthology that should also make the writings of the Kyoto School more accessible. The translation of Nishitani's *What Is Religion?* is also expected to be published soon as well as two new translations of Nishida's *Study of Good*, perhaps still the best starting point for the study of modern Japanese philosophy. Thus, in many ways, the future of Western studies on the Kyoto School seems bright.

Yet, there are still difficulties to be surmounted. First, the Kyoto School has yet to make any significant impact on Western philosophy per se. Most of the dialogue with the West has been in theological, not purely philosophical, forums. Why is there this disparity? From a narrowly defined analytic philosophical perspective, the Kyoto School philosophers can be unfairly accused of generating meaningless metaphysical abstractions. To take one example, suppose one grants that concepts may be empty. It does not follow from this that we need the category *emptiness*, a category to be opposed to another abstraction, *Being*. Now it may be that Zen Buddhists like Suzuki speak as they do because that way of speaking is useful in leading someone to an insight, but that does not make their utterances themselves philosophical. They are simply performatives, statements used to do something, not to say something. In short, to a certain extent, narrow analytic philosophers would criticize the Kyoto School on many of the same points they criticize the Western Continental tradition.

Certain Continental philosophers, on the other hand, would level a quite different criticism, namely, that the Kyoto School philosophers often blur the distinction between phenomenology and metaphysics. In other words, they maintain it is always important to distinguish whether one is describing (or analyzing) the structure of an experience or the structure of a metaphysical entity. Does *mu* (nothingness) refer to the way things are experienced or does it refer to the thing that is experienced? The difference is crucial because it affects one's methodology. In talking about the relationship between Being and Nothingness, for example, is one describing an aspect of experience or is one logically deducing what the relationship must be?

Everyone admits that some experiences are ambiguous, are difficult to describe

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without contradiction, but very few Western philosophers would want to say that metaphysical truths (which are, in the final analysis, the objects of logic) can be contradictory. Hence, Being cannot be the same as Nothing, delusion cannot be the same as enlightenment. This position does not deny, however, that what is *experienced* as Being can also be *experienced* as Nothing, or that the content of a delusion is the same as the content of enlightenment. To take a specific example, it is perfectly acceptable to say that shadows cannot be seen unless there is also some light present, but it is nonsense to say, therefore, that shadows *are* light. Part of the difficulty here is that of translation. For some time, translators rendered the word *soku* as the English copula *is*, for example. But the word *soku*, unlike the English copula, does not necessarily exclude the conjoining of contrary terms. It is misleading, therefore, to translate "*x soku not-x*" as "*x is not-x*."

In short, translators (and the Kyoto School philosophers themselves when they write in Western languages) must be more precise in explaining whether they are being descriptive of human experience or logically analyzing the relationship between concepts. They must also avoid coining terms that are more puzzling than illuminating. For example, what does "Suchness" really mean? If it means, for example, "things being (or showing themselves) such as they really are," why not use that phrase rather than making an adverb into a noun? Part of the problem is that very few philosophers today will tolerate the hyperboles of German Idealism and, if it is possible to write or translate in a style that is not Hegelian, that would be preferred.

A second recommendation is that further research be done that would place the Kyoto School in the larger context of Japanese thought. It may be true that the Kyoto philosophers themselves do not often make explicit reference to classical Japanese thought, but the Western audience would benefit from knowing more clearly how modern Japanese thought is part of a much older tradition. In particular, more attention should be given to themes that run throughout the Japanese tradition and are found in aesthetic, literary, dramatic, and poetic works as well as Buddhist treatises. For example, one might trace the theme of emotions as related to knowledge, or the relationship between principles and feelings. Such ideas are discussed in ancient Heian works as well as in the modern Kyoto School.

Third, more work needs to be done on the phenomenological description of insight and less on the content of that insight. In order to clarify the difference, if any, between God and emptiness, perhaps one should more thoroughly analyze what it means to experience God as compared with experiencing emptiness. Theological or buddhological concepts are abstractions from human experience and can be quite misleading if we forget the concrete realities from which they are derived.

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Fourth, the Kyoto School should return to Nishida's original questions about the relationship between religion, aesthetics, and ethics. The way in which these three are related in Japanese religion is quite distinctive and it raises important philosophical questions of universal interest. I do not mean to imply that the Kyoto School is no longer interested in this issue, but rather, that the topic should perhaps be more emphasized as an item for East-West dialogue. It is an issue of great cultural importance around the world.

In conclusion, the Kyoto School of philosophy is one of the most dynamic and provocative forces in world thought today. In this time when religious ideals are being eroded in every technological nation, when there is a need for a new humanism, and when communication across cultures is a prerequisite to world peace and the survival of the human race, the Kyoto School has much to offer. The West has ignored this tradition for too long, but there are preliminary signs that at least some Western thinkers are ready to listen, to question, and even to criticize a movement that began when Nishida wrote the opening line of *Study of Good*: "To experience means to know the facts just as they are."